

A decorative border in a dark blue color, featuring intricate floral and scrollwork patterns that frame the central text.

Sensitivity

trinsghost

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Summary:

You live in Derry, though you're not native to the town. An ability you have and use (sparingly, with caution) gets you into a tricky situation with a local, ancient predator, disguised as a clown. What are his intentions? Read more to find out.

1. Chapter 1

For as long as I could remember, I've been able to lay hands on or have skin contact with a person and see glimpses into their mind; feel what they felt, saw, tasted and smelled. It scared the hell out of me at times, even if it was an innocent graze, but the other relatives in my family who had it too helped me to hone and temper this ability. Knowing that I could keep it at bay if I touched someone else for a few seconds kept me sane, and allowed me to feel comfortable enough to interact with others. Allowing myself to use this gift, if you want to call it that, to purposely read into people when I wanted to, kept me cautiously optimistic of those I met, especially my closest friends, only two of whom knew my secret.

It was an unusually warm autumn day in Derry, and college classes ended early for me on Friday the 13th, just a few weeks til Halloween. As I headed to my car my phone rang, playing a song I knew to be for my friend Christy (Divinyls - heh).

"Y/N, hey hon! You're still up for the haunted maze tonight with me and Lani, right?"

I tossed my purse in the car, folding myself into the driver's seat and slipping my book bag to the side. I nearly forgot about my promise for tonight, considering I had a paper to write over the weekend. Resisting the urge to sigh into the phone, I relented, starting my car.

"Yeah, I'm still up for it. Can't be out too late though. I've got a.." and she cut me off.

"...You've got a paper for your environmental engineering class, I know. Mr Wicker is such a great teacher for dumping all this work on you guys, especially around fun weekends," she barked out a laugh. I could tell she was getting ready, what with her Friday night playlist blaring in the background.

"He's a peach, I know. But, at least the class is interesting. I'll meet you downtown by the movie theater at 5. We're eating in town and taking one car, right?"

Christy volunteered Lani to drive this evening, so I didn't feel tempted to top off my tank on the way home. Tonight was supposed to be a warm night for October (high 50's), but even so, hearing that the maze might be interactive had me pulling out a cardigan and a pair of knitted gloves from my closet, taking precautions that I might accidentally touch someone, and for longer than I wanted to.

I'd settled on a short sleeved white blouse with embroidery that reminded me of Marion from Raiders of the Lost ark (the monkey scene), a long sleeved cardigan in a deep red wine and jeans for the evening, with grey gloves.

The ladies and I had breakfast for dinner at the local ice cream parlour/diner called The Scoop, and headed out in Lani's truck to the edge of the town line where the maze was situated. Despite only being around for two years, the Haunted Haystacks were impressive. Part building, part maze made of hay stacks and rolls, the barriers had to be twelve feet tall, some sections covered with thatched or metal roofing, leading braves souls through certain areas in relative darkness.

Lani found a parking spot in the makeshift lot a few rows from the front. We piled out, collectively moaning over the line trailing out of the entrance. But then Christy remembered we had VIP tickets. "These get us into an express line, where we sign a waiver allowing the 'scaracters' to touch us, and be touched in return," she noted while we walked up and past the main line.

"Only PG touches though, right?" I asked. They both knew I wasn't being silly. Turning around to see my serious face, Christy said "Yes, y/n, they won't be getting too handsy with any of us, most of all you. Can't do any of that unless you say so."

"Although, if any of the guys in there are hot, or girls for that matter," Lani grinned, pulling her ID from her pocket. She didn't need to finish. I knew my girls were trolling for some fun.

"If either of you does meet anyone worthy in there tonight, can yah at least guarantee the three of us has a ride home?" I laughed, Lani nodding 'yes, of course!' before we got to the sign-in booth. We brandished our ID's to prove we were over 18, read over the waivers

and signed our lives away. Stepping into the express line, I noticed our lanyards were striped in red and white hanging from our necks, the white glowing as we passed a few black lights strewn overhead. The badge itself had a scratch and sniff sticker on it that smelled of peppermint candy. I was still full from dinner, and found the smell a little cringe-worthy, bouncing up and down in an effort to tetris my food down to settle my stomach.

They both talked me into checking off “touches ok” on the waiver, promising to be near me if anyone in particular looked like they might get too close for comfort. “It says here they can touch us 5 different ways. Five!” I skimmed down to the bottom of the form that had the list in small font.

“They can freaking LICK you?” I hollered, my friends choking on giggles as we neared the front of the line. “Ugh, maybe they’ll have someone come up behind us and burp in our ears!” I exclaimed, a guy behind us chiming in with “it’s Belch Huggins, coming for you from beyond the grave..muHAHAHA!”

The girls reassured me I’d be fine, swearing if anyone even tried anything, they would drag them away. We could even give a safeword (mine was “popcorn”) and the actors would leave us alone, at least for that section of the maze.

As we entered, I realized I left my gloves on the seat in Lani’s truck. I didn’t want to panic and turn back right as we were about to head in, so I pulled my cardigan’s sleeves down a bit, balling my hands into fists and hiding them from view.

Christy noticed what I did, mild worry on her face as the light around us faded. I didn’t want it to be a cause for concern, though. Shrugging it off, I slipped an arm around hers, smiling nervously, and we walked slowly through the start of the maze, Lani bringing up the rear with giggles and occasional whoops and hollers (she doesn’t scream...it takes a lot to get her to that point).

The scaracters were all very well done, dressed up in styles from the last century or so, with very elaborate makeup, costumes and backdrops. We were about two thirds of the way through, low light shifting colors from maroon, to orange, to yellow, introducing an

area done up like a circus tent. Walking forward, I nearly tripped when I heard Lani genuinely scream from behind us. Christy and I whipped around to see her pointing at a cotton candy machine. "That's not cotton candy! That's pink spider webs! Augh!" she yelled, running over to us, laughing and shaking, the actor nearby clearly energizing her with a creepy carnie/eight-armed spider character that slid his "hands" along her back as we sprinted away.

We were nearly out of the circus area when I saw a boy, much younger than I thought would be allowed in this maze, standing alone. He was looking around frantically, tears shining in his eyes. I pulled away from Christy, nodding and noting I'd be alright. Walking up to the boy, I noticed the yellow jacket he wore was slicked with water. (Huh, it didn't rain today. Maybe he's an actor?)

"Hey there, are you doing okay? Are you lost?" I asked him, looking down as he tugged at the bottom of his coat.

"I'm okay. I'm sure they'll come back for me. I should go back to the sewer and see if they're there," he said, sniffing and rubbing his nose with his left hand.

I thought he meant the section we went through about ten minutes back, fully prepared to walk with him to find his family. "I can go with you if you want. Whether you're a visitor like me, or working here, it's probably not good for you to be alone," I nodded to him.

Raising his hand up to mine, his fingers wrapped around the end of my cardigan and we turned around, beginning the trek backward. Hoping I wouldn't get in trouble for going the wrong way, I was about to stop and ask one of the actors that just had a group pass them when the boy doubled over, crying out in pain.

"Oh my gosh, are you alright?" I asked him, bending down to his side.

"I just..need to get back to my family!" he cried out.

"Okay, let's get you back! Are you able to walk, or are you in too much pain?" I looked up again for the nearest scarachter, but didn't see him. I was nearly ready to pick the boy up and carry him myself

when he stood up again and looked at me, grinning.

“I think we should float back. Don’t you wanna float too?” he giggled, the menace in his voice sending chills up my spine. If he was a young actor in the middle of all of this, I was impressed. But something about him seemed off. I looked around again for someone, anyone else working the maze, when I felt his little fingers peel back the sleeve of my cardigan. I gasped as a few seconds passed, and as he yelled “BOO!”, calling attention to his face, I saw him change, disintegrating, breaking up into mounds of dry earth until he was gone, only his yellow coat remaining. The right arm of the coat was torn clean off from the elbow, the end of the sleeve coated in red.

“Holy hell,” I gasped, my pulse shooting sky high. I turned around, about to walk (run like the wind) back to my friends when an arm shot out from my right, the owner of it hidden in darkness. I yelled “POPCORN”, trying to dodge him and pull away as he grabbed me. Thankfully, the hand was gloved, but the way he gripped mine was bordering on painful.

He stepped out of the shadows, giggling as he pulled me towards him. He was tall and ghostly white, had to have been six feet and change, dressed in a silvery white clown costume that was straight out of the Elizabethan era. Tufts of red hair framed his painted face. Bells jangled from all over his clothing as I tried yanking my arm back, my jaw dropping when he yanked at my hand once more. “I said, POPCORN!” I yelled, my face draining of any mirth I could possibly have on this night.

“Popcorn! Ha ha!” he laughed. “Don’t mind if I do!” He was about to pull me towards where he’d stepped from when I yanked back again, this time with enough force that I thought I’d drag him with me. In that split second though, I made a colossally bad move, my fingers slipping over his wrist, skin touching skin. The yank failed from my end, and he pulled back, me running into his chest, both of us with very surprised looks on our faces.

My eyesight went dark the moment the sensation hit. I could hear and feel wetness, sloshing through water, smelling of decay, grime and garbage. A moment passed, and I could hear the delicate tune of a music box or childrens toy being played with nearby. Then an echo

of screams, blood curdling, close enough to make my skin crawl. And now, sex. Wait, what? I could hear panting, moaning, scratches across a rough, hard surface, and the smell of sweat and arousal. And vomit...wait, no, red oak (that tree smells of sweat and vomit), and fresh pine needles. I was outside somewhere. I could almost see, feeling breath on my hair and the impression of someone walking around me, watching me, but a thin layer of fog blurred my vision, someone not wanting me to see.

Realizing I was gritting my teeth, holding my breath and nearly zapped of energy, I willed myself back from the touch, pulling my hand from the clown's wrist. He looked as startled as I felt, though when I moved to step back, he wrapped a hand around my arm, fingers curling at my elbow.

"Found you," he whispered, his voice bewildered and rasping.

"Oh no. No you didn't," I pulled back, and this time he let me go. I didn't even look back as I ran forward through the maze, zipping past actors and scenes I hadn't gone through before.

2. Chapter 2

My friends were nearly at the end, both stopped to wait and see if I'd catch up. Christy was almost in tears, holding back her panic just enough to keep watch of the time and how long I'd been gone. Lani consoled her as they stood to the side, nodding their thanks to the nearest actor who accepted their safe words, letting them wait without being bothered.

I jogged up to them, surprising both with a big hug. "I am so sorry guys. I saw a kid and was walking back with him when he turned out to be a character, I think. And then I saw a clown who grabbed me, and then I grabbed him, and.."

"Whoa, you two didn't get romantic at our expense, did you?" Lani asked, thankful I was back, but clearly curious as to what happened.

"No! No, far from it. I don't know what he was up to, but he tried pulling me into a dark area, and I didn't want to go, and I grabbed him by the wrist, and.." I panted as we walked, nearing the end of the maze.

"Oh, crap. You touched him didn't you?" Christy cut in, wiping a tear from her eyes. Hugging her from the side, I nodded.

"I did. Didn't mean to, but I had my hand on him just long enough for me to zone out," I shook my head, still feeling the memory of that fog blocking my view.

"Aww shit. I hope he wasn't scary," Lani grimaced, looking up in relief as we cleared the end of the maze, the lighting brighter and crowds taking on a more pleasant tone.

"It was strange, and very quick, I suspect. But I'm fine. Really, I was expecting this to happen tonight. The fact that it only happened once...I consider myself lucky. C'mon, let's get to your truck Lani and head back to town."

We got back into downtown around 11 at night, the air chilled to a point that we all shivered as we piled out of Lani's truck. We hugged, said our 'see you later's' and split off to our respective homes.

Sitting down on my bed with a steaming cup of coffee, I was planning to start typing out the intro to my paper when I was hit with a flash of something familiar. Music again, playing softly in the distance, cool wet air, then copper on my tongue. (Huh. That was new.) Drawing myself up on my bed to sit cross legged, I closed my eyes, steadying my breath and willed a deep dive into my subconscious. Going over the scenes again in my mind, I could hear, smell, feel and taste, but something was still blocking my sight. Shaking my head, I fought to break down the barrier, only to be hit back with a blinding headache. That put my homework on hold for tonight. Downing a few painkillers, I changed into my pajamas, slipping under layers of warm fuzzy blankets. I fell asleep massaging a pressure point on one hand, not realizing another set of hands were rubbing my temples, fingers releasing me into a deep sleep.

Waking from a dream that left me restless, I shot up from bed, the fragments of what I'd experienced much clearer, but threatening to dissolve from my memory.

I swore quietly as I got out of bed, turning the light on to fish around for a pad of paper and a pen. Carefully jotting down what I remembered, the clearest or most obscure recollections filled the page in minutes. Looked to my alarm clock, it was 5:30am and too late to go back to bed. I grabbed some breakfast, reheated my coffee and began planning an investigation as the pieces of this memory fell into place.

The Barrens had always been a favorite place in town for me. My family moved to Derry when I was in middle school and as a kid, I would roleplay with friends, running through the forest and the shallow areas of the river. In my high school and now college years, it became a place to study. The whole town was rich with history spanning hundreds of years, but this area felt like it remained unchanged, like Mother Nature herself was dead set against modernization happening here. That is, apart from the sewer tunnels.

Getting to the forest surrounding The Barrens a little after 6am, I

slipped on a light jacket and grabbed a lantern from the back seat, turning it on to its lowest setting. I headed down a bike trail that stretched for a good mile or two, winding down towards the Kenduskeag River. I could hear the rustling of squirrels in the trees, an owl's hooting, tucked away in a pine tree. A rooster called out from a nearby farm, a sliver of dawn's light calling it to task.

I walked carefully down towards the river, seeing a few of the sewer tunnels a hundred or so yards off. The place was peaceful, water sloshing and gurgling over rocks. 'Why was I here?' I thought to myself. 'Why was this connected to the...vision I experienced?' Heading over to a boulder lodged near the river, I sat down, content to watch the sun creep over the horizon. Switching off my lantern, I looked around, surveying the path I just took, wondering if I should walk around a little longer. A big red oak on the opposite side of the river (just a stream here) caught my eye, so I got up and made my way to a shallow area with plenty of rocks to use as stepping stones, hopping across. Walking up to the tree, my eyesight seemed to shake and blur. Worried that I was getting another headache, I reached out towards the tree, aiming to lean back and take a couple Tylenol. As soon as my hand touched the gnarled bark, my field of view disappeared and my memory came rushing back to me.

3. Chapter 3

Three months ago, I'd headed down to The Barrens to work on a study for a summer internship for the local government. It involved the evolution of the sewer system in town, and its level of cleanliness at various points. I'd heard about the "Gray Water" some folks encountered here and there, and was hoping I wouldn't see it down at the river. Thankfully, when I got there just shy of sunrise, I took note that the water rolling downstream looked and smelled clean and clear. Pulling a small bottle from my jacket, I collected a sample of water, noting with a Sharpie where I got it from. Jotting a few notes onto a pocket sized notepad, I slipped it and the sample into my jacket, turning to head towards one of the sewer tunnels for a sample. I had to make my way back up the trail, then down a bit to get to one of the bigger ones. Unfortunately, the cracking of a branch on the forest floor and a few heated giggles stopped me dead in my tracks.

I didn't move, wouldn't dare except to breathe. They couldn't see me, but I could certainly see them. Two individuals, a young couple, a man and woman I recognized from college were leaned up against a big red oak, its branches looming over them, covered in leaves that swayed in the gentle summer breeze.

They were kissing, arms wrapped around one another in quiet comfort. Then the man pressed his lover against the tree, hands wandering up and down along her curves. Her hands slid down to the edge of his shirt, grabbing it and yanking it over his head, revealing his lightly tanned, well toned upper body. Their kisses became more frantic, stopping only for him to peel the tank top off of her. She was braless, her back pressed against the rough bark of the tree, breasts bouncing as the man lifted her legs to wrap around his waist, bucking his hips against hers with a rhythm I could feel thumping against my pulse.

Their moans, half-whispers and panting echoed along the more subdued area of the river, making it impossible to tune out. I wanted to turn away for several reasons, just turn off the noise and be back at my car - one being that I didn't want to be found out and called a peeping tom, two because I had more samples to take and work to do

(that I could do elsewhere), and three, despite being a virgin (who was holding off on sex and dating til after college), the scene playing out before me was hot, and I couldn't help that it was making me a little wet.

"Fuck me," I thought, stuck in a dilemma of 'should I watch or politely look away'.

I heard a deep, growly "heh heh heh" around me, certain my mind was playing tricks on me.

I'd worked the courage to take a single step away from the location when I felt a pair of eyes on me. Not knowing where the source was, I panned around the cavorting couple, looking further up the hill. As soon as I saw him our eyes locked. I could barely make out his form, but what little I could see of him had me scrunching my eyebrows in confusion. He was very tall, clothed in a shimmering outfit that seemed tight on his limbs, loose and billowy around his shoulders, knees and midsection. His eyes were pale, a bright gold that glowed in the shadows. They darted back and forth between me and the couple who were about to fuck against the red oak tree. For a moment, I thought I could hear him chuckle. Whether it was for me or the couple, I didn't know, though a sense of dread was starting to build, a need to get away from this area feeling very imminent.

Both of us had an ideal view of the young couple as they eventually stripped down, bare and glistening with sweat as they writhed and thrust against one another. Their antics would have been downright titillating, if not for the guy staring back at me, doing who knows what in the shadow of the trees up the hill from them.

Feeling a blush creep up my neck, I looked down, not eager to see anything more that would increase my discomfort, or my arousal. But I felt his eyes bore into me, raking over my form as the couple moaned and whimpered, their combined voices getting higher as their climaxes loomed ever closer.

Swallowing thickly, I chanced a glance up the hill again, only to lose sight of the man. I looked around in alarm, eyes combing the area around the couple until I saw him again, in plain sight, much closer to them than he had been before.

I was surprised at his boldness. He was leaning against a tree, close enough to be seen by them, and yet they didn't seem to notice at all. He smiled, all-knowing, dark and seductive, in a manner that made things deep and low in me tighten and ache with need. I licked my lips, watching his tongue dart along his front teeth. In that moment, I felt a sickening need to run a hand down, over the seam of my pants along my crotch. I shook off the thought, drawing my hands around my sides, trembling as I heard his labored breathing circle around me.

Glancing back to the couple, the man slipped his hand between the woman's legs, his ministrations and continued thrusts bringing the woman to a powerful climax. She cried out his name, her legs shaking, feet nearly slipping from around his waist. As her back arched against the tree, her lover's orgasm hit. He shuddered, crumpling against her and growling against her shoulder. I could see the muscles just above his backside clench as he stilled, spilling his seed into her. A minute later, they whispered the quietest of sweet nothings, kissing gently as he lowered her legs to the ground.

Realizing I was still there and somewhat out in the open, I took a step back and was blinded by pain again. Pulling back from the red oak tree, I realized what I'd just seen. This was a memory I experienced this past summer, and had somehow wiped it from my the forefront of my mind. But why? What else had happened that made me want to block it?

Rattled with confusion, I started walking back down the hill, looking for the rocks I could hop back along to get across the stream. Finally seeing them, I crossed and headed back up the trail. Or at least, I thought that was the trail. Wasn't it? In my hurried attempt back to my car, I found myself turned around, not recognizing where I was or knowing the way back to familiar ground. Looking up to the skies, my frazzled nerves threatened to do me in, grey clouds swirling overhead. I latched a hand onto the nearest tree in an effort to calm myself, closing my eyes and slowing my breathing.

"Breathe. Just breathe. You'll be fine. Just get home and you'll be alright," I said to myself.

Opening my eyes, my heart clenched as terror wrapped its ice cold

fingers around me. Looking up, I realized I was back at the red oak tree, and not three feet from me was the clown.

“I’ve found you,” he whispered, walking slowly towards me. “You’ve come back.”

Author's Note:

Thank you folks for having a read. If you've enjoyed the story so far, let me know! (If you're not into IT, or clowns, especially Pennywise, I understand if you want to pass on reading.)